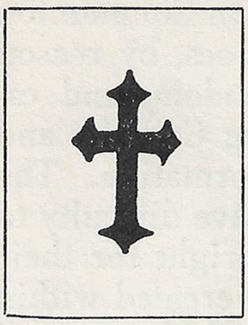

Our Catholic Heritage

By EDWARD N. PERKINS

A NATIONAL GUILD OF CHURCHMEN TRACT

OUR CATHOLIC HERITAGE

The Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Communion as a whole, suffer as no other Church does, by reason of the broken-up condition of Christendom, and especially by reason of the gulf separating Catholic and Protestant which resulted from the Reformation. The general run of educated Episcopalians have difficulty to form intelligent opinions as to what is right for their Church in the face of the severe strains created within it by some of the effects of the "Ecumenical Movement." The strains are in fact a tug of war between Catholic forces and Protestant forces, and Episcopalians are liable to be confused through want of understanding of what Catholic is and ignorance of the Catholic tradition of their Church.

The key to understanding of the issues, is a conception of what is the One Holy Catholic Church which in the creeds we all affirm belief in. Perhaps a good many of us hardly know the meaning of the affirmation we make.

Most Episcopalians have been taught that Catholic as used in the creeds means universal, and have understood that to mean all-embracing. Then it embraces all Christian bodies and all Christian people at least. And mostly we have been satisfied to let it go at that. Yet few would describe the newest American sects as Catholic.

Catholic really implies the quality of wholeness, rather than that of being all-embracing. And the idea of that wholeness implies wholeness in its integrity. For instance, the Catholic Faith, the Faith of the Church, is the whole Faith not only without subtraction of anything whatever, but without addition. And Catholic implies also oneness. The oneness and the Apostolicity mentioned in the Nicene Creed are truly a part of the Church's Catholicity, so that really the expression of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in * * * the holy Catholic Church," includes all that is in the Nicene Creed.

It is the conviction that the Church must be one which caused both the Orthodox and the Roman communions to claim, at the great schism of 1054, to be that one, and therefore to be the whole Catholic Church; that the other was a body in schism which had seceded from the Church and ceased to be a part of it. And that claim each maintains to this day. Yet an unbiased observer finds it hard indeed to decide that either is any more the one true Church than the other. The unity which is Catholic is above the destructive reach of human error and quarrel.

The Church is eternal. We may perhaps apply to the Church what the psalmist says of the Almighty: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." The two millennia of its existence on earth are as nothing in the life of the Church, extending as it does into the heavenly places and embracing all the faithful departed forever

blessed in the light of the eternal Presence. The breaches of visible unity which we experience are but a fleeting momentary episode in the timeless life of the Holy Catholic Church. There is other wholeness, and other oneness, than that visible unity which at this moment we sadly lack.

Most of us are familiar with the make-up of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in its origins. It was the Apostles, and those disciples of our Lord who after His Resurrection attached themselves to the Apostles. So strong was the conviction among them that the original ministry commissioned by our Lord as meant by Him to comprise twelve, that they immediately ordained Matthias to fill the void caused by the defection of Iscariot. The Twelve were recognized on all hands as the commissioned governors and guides of the devoted band of disciples. As time went on, successors were needed and successors were ordained. Thus from the very start Holy Church has been Apostolic.

At the outset the only commissioned ministers were the Twelve. Soon they needed help and seven deacons were ordained. As time went on the priesthood developed through Apostolic delegation of the power and duty to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. The Apostles' successors are the bishops. Through them as such successors the continuity of the ministry and so of the Church is maintained and the Apostolic authority is transmitted to succeeding bishops and through them to the priests and deacons to whom they delegate a part of their Apostolic authority. Thus the Apostolate is preserved in the Christian ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons which is the Catholic ministry (See Prayer Book, page 529).

In this way endurance through time is secured to the Church in this our world of space and time in which nothing can be without endurance through time. Nothing without past and future, however brief, can be. And this endurance through time is of the essence of the unity of the Church. Regarding it as from the beginning, the future of the Apostolic ministry extends to now, and looking backward from now its past extends to the beginning. Thus there is a unity of all the lines of the Apostolic ministry. Looking backward from now all lines, Roman, Orthodox, Anglican, or whatever, converge at some point in the past and run on together backwards to the origin; that is, to the Twelve and to Jesus Christ who commissioned them. This is true of all lines of ministry having the uninterrupted Apostolic Succession, and only of such lines.

In this way the temporally divided Church is seen plainly to be one in a common inseparableness from the Apostles and their Lord and the Church of the earlier centuries. In this unity with the Apostolic Church of Christ our Episcopal Church shares fully, unlike some other bodies that are called Churches.

This identity through continuity with the Church of the Apostles takes on a vividness of reality for us who

belong to the Catholic Church of the creeds when we recall St. Paul's words in the fifth chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians:

> "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

It is this which is echoed in the familiar hymn:

> "From heaven he came and sought her
> To be his holy bride,
> With his own blood he bought her
> And for her life he died."

And so our form of solemnization of Holy Matrimony likens the indissoluble union of marriage to "the mystical union which is betwixt Christ and his Church."

Though the Church Militant in which we find ourselves in this temporal world is for the moment a broken body, yet it is one with the Church in eternity, in the unity of which it shall, in the consummation of all things, be gathered up and as it were lost as a river is lost in the sea. And even now that unity in eternity is with us, and the Holy Catholic Church in this our world is always in that eternity, in the great common worship and sacramental oneness of the Holy Eucharist. The unity of continuity with the Apostolic Church is caught up in that, which is the glory and wonder and mystery common to all Christian bodies of Apostolic Succession in unison with the heavenly host lost in wonder and praise in the glorious light of Him who sits upon the throne and of the Lamb that was slain. In the Apocalypse (Revelation) of St. John the Divine we are given a glimpse such as we are able to receive of the worship of heaven which we faintly echo in the "Holy, Holy, Holy" of the Sanctus.

It is in that act of worship called the Holy Communion (by the Roman Catholics the Mass, a simple and convenient name, and by the Orthodox the Holy Liturgy) that the superficially divided Catholic Church is profoundly one, and one with the Church Expectant and the Church Triumphant.

We come to that act of Holy Communion to receive what Jesus said is His Body and Blood, and we do it as He instructed us, in remembrance of Him, and that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us (Prayer Book, page 82). But we dare not come to that "sacred banquet wherein Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given unto us," without first offering sacrifice to Almighty God of all that we have and are, and pleading before Him as our justification the eternal sacrifice of the Cross of Calvary. We Episcopalians partake in that offering and that worship and that Communion in common with Christians of all other

bodies of Apostolic Succession. Herein all are one.

In the Offertory (which is not the handing up of money at Morning Prayer) the bread and the wine represent symbolically the fruits of our labour. They are our gifts of our work and lives and all that we have and are. As the priest places them upon the altar he offers these our gifts representing our all to Almighty God (See Prayer Book, page 73, third rubric). As in the Prayer of Consecration this bread and wine become the sacramental Body and Blood, they stand upon the altar as an offering and so re-present before the Father the Sacrifice of Calvary as we recall the Lord's "blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension" (Prayer Book, page 81). And with these holy gifts we offer also our praise and thanksgiving (ibid.) and our selves, our souls and bodies (ibid.).

All of this offering taken together is the Eucharistic Sacrifice or Sacrifice of the Mass. We dare not come to the altar to receive the Lord's Body and Blood without first offering this sacrifice which is the sacrifice of the Church and, as the archbishops of the Church of England said in their open letter to all the bishops of the Holy Catholic Church on the occasion of the statement of Pope Leo XIII that our Anglican orders are not valid, there is a "relation which unites the sacrifice of the eternal Priest and the sacrifice of the Church, which in some way certainly are one." The eternal Priest is Jesus Christ and His sacrifice is His self-offering which He made of His life on earth and completed on the Cross.

Retracing of steps, extrication from established misunderstanding, confession of error, are always matters of the utmost difficulty. The Apostolic ministry, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice which is in some way one with that of the eternal Priest, were repudiated and even reviled and contemned in the heat and violence which the Reformation engendered. What we now call the "Ecumenical Movement" has not developed to the point where its true nature or its possibilities are clear, but that side of it which receives general publicity seems to be rooted in the idea of a united Protestantism which has shown no concern to recover the Apostolic ministry or the Eucharistic and sacramental worship which happily our Anglican Communion has never lost.

From even before the accession of Queen Elizabeth of England in 1558 until the present time, our Church, amid pressure and abuse from right and left, has held in ministry and worship to the Apostolic ministry which is one with the ministry of the Apostles whom our Lord Jesus Christ commissioned, and to the worship of the Holy Catholic Church of the creeds wherein is offered the sacrifice of the Church which, as the archbishops said, certainly is in some way one with the sacrifice of the eternal Priest upon the Cross "who made there (by his one oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world" (Prayer Book, page 80).

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